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ABSTRACT

Based on the experiences of several community colleges, this report examines successful and unsuccessful strategies utilized in the formation of lay advisory committees for the humanities. The report first presents brief descriptions of successful committee organization efforts at five institutions: Clark College (Vancouver, WA), Brevard Community College (Cocoa, FL), Shoreline Community College (Seattle, WA), Olympic College (Bremerton, WA), and the San Diego Community College District (CA). With variations, the descriptions include the name of a contact person; detail recruitment and selection procedures; and outline the role of the advisory committee in forming humanities honors programs, assisting in program evaluation, maintaining liaisons with humanists in the community, and assuming other related responsibilities. The report then presents descriptions of unsuccessful efforts at three multi-campus districts. The report concludes with guidelines based on an analysis of these successful and unsuccessful efforts, revealing that: (1) committee success is dependent upon the support and enthusiasm of faculty and administrators; (2) committee functions must be articulated and involve members in meaningful, rather than perfunctory, tasks; and (3) multi-campus districts may have more difficulty in establishing advisory committees than single campuses. (JP)

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Center for the Study of Community Colleges
Los Angeles, California

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PROJECT REPORT #14: FORMATION AND USES OF LAY ADVISORY GROUPS FOR THE HUMANITIES

Miriam M. Beckwith

One of the recommendations emanating from the Center for the Study of Community Colleges' research on humanities education in two year colleges has been that lay advisory committees, similar in structure and purpose to those in the occupational programs, should be established. Lay advisory committees are needed to give the humanities department a community connection and to build a support group to serve as advocates for the college's humanities program both on and off campus.

Over the past few years Center staff have presented this recommendation to administrators and two year college faculty at meetings and through publications. Several colleges and a few districts have recognized the need for a humanities support group and have either established a lay advisory committee or are in the process of so doing.

This paper describes the process followed by the institutions that have successfully established an advisory group. The names of individuals to contact for additional information are included. Approaches that have not worked out well are also discussed.

Successes

Clark College (Vancouver, Washington) -- Allen Gates

After reading this recommendation in a Center publication, Mr. Gates, the Chairman of the Humanities Division, decided to try to establish an advisory committee at his college. He talked about this idea with each of the faculty members in the Division and received both positive reactions and questions as to the purpose of such a group and the effect it would have on matters considered to be within their professional province. By working with faculty on a one to one basis, Mr. Gates demonstrated to the more sceptical instructors that such a committee could be beneficial to the Division and thus gained the support of two-thirds of his colleagues.

At an administratively funded retreat the supportive faculty met, discussed the committee, and agreed to its formation. Names of potential members were solicited with faculty having the veto power over any nominee. Eventually the college president asked 12 people (through an official letter) and nine accepted. These nine included a poet, city council person, physician, business woman, librarian, puppeteer, newspaper editor, and a coordinator for county human resources. All acknowledged that the humanities had diminished in importance in the community; all were eager to help the college reverse this situation.

The college president attended the first meeting and welcomed the members. The first few meetings were primarily informational with the Chairman of the English Department, who serves as the Division's official liaison to the committee, and Mr. Gates there to provide necessary information and to answer the committee's questions. The committee decided to undertake a project to develop a humanities

honors program to insure the maintenance of quality humanities offerings and to encourage and attract high caliber students. The committee now meets quarterly and their plans are to institute the honors program in 1982 to coincide with the college's 50th anniversary celebration.

•Brevard Community College (Cocoa, Florida) -- Robert Aitken

The suggestion to form a humanities advisory group was made by the National Endowment for the Humanities consultant to various members of the humanities program as part of a consultancy grant during Fall 1979. Mr. Aitken, Chairman of the Division of Liberal Arts, spoke individually to faculty members; explained the purpose of such a group; assured them that it would not infringe on the faculty prerogatives of curriculum and instruction; and gained their support prior to meeting formally as a Division and approving the establishment of an advisory group.

Through faculty and people in the community 25 individuals were identified as potential council members. All were contacted, and twenty agreed to participate. Two basic criteria were followed in the nomination process; all areas of the county should be represented, and the nominees should be enthusiastic individuals who would have the time and interest to serve for a one-year term with the possibility of reappointment for subsequent terms. Although faculty members are not official Council members, they are invited to meetings to provide information and to observe. The college has a representative on the Council, who helps the Chairman develop the agenda, assists in the necessary arrangements, and is the official liaison between the college and the Council.

Because of the size of the Council and the difficulty of finding a meeting time suitable for all members, a steering committee was formed. This group meets more frequently and brings the results of its sessions to the entire Council for final decisions.

At the initial meeting, a summary of the possible roles and responsibilities of an Humanities Advisory Council was presented to the new members. Those roles were adopted with only minor changes:

BREVARD COLLEGE'S HUMANITIES ADVISORY COUNCIL ROLES

- To assist in evaluating and reshaping the humanities program of the college.
- To assist in exploring opportunities for cooperative humanities offerings with other departments of the college as well as with other agencies in the community.
- To develop a pool of community people who could act as program leaders and resource persons for humanities activities.
- To assist in enhancing community interest in the humanities.
- To provide channels and suggestions for the use of college humanists as community scholars on a professional consultant basis.

- To be an advocate board in favor of humanities education,
- To advise the humanities faculty and students on job development and placement opportunities.
- To alert the college to specific community needs.
- To provide assistance in finding external funding for the humanities.
- To provide a continuing forum for defining the issues, uses, purposes, and application of the humanities in individual, corporate and civic life and for improving the quality of life of residents in the area.

For its first project, the Council decided to assist the Humanities Division in the planning of the proposed new introductory humanities course. Mr. Aitken reported that the involvement of the Council in the construction of the new course has been extremely beneficial. The members' ideas on teaching strategies and on possible materials and resources have allowed the Division to consider perspectives that heretofore had not been possible. In Mr. Aitken's words, "The Advisory Council is the best thing to happen to the humanities at Brevard College."

•Shoreline Community College (Seattle, Washington) -- Denzil Walters, Dennis Peters, and Louise Douglas.

After attending a May 1980 workshop coordinated by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges on the Formation of Lay Advisory Committees, Mr. Walters, Chairman of the Humanities Division; Ms. Douglas, Assistant Chairman; and Dennis Peters, Professor of Humanities, became convinced that such a committee was both feasible and desirable. During the first weeks of Fall Quarter they proposed the idea to others in the Division. Additional interest in the committee was generated by other activities connected with the statewide National Endowment for the Humanities grant.

In December at a Divisional meeting a formal proposal was made to create a Humanities Advisory Committee, which would advise the faculty in areas similar to those established at Brevard. The motion was unanimously approved. All interested faculty were then invited to attend a second meeting to set up the nomination procedure and the qualifications for members. It was decided that those nominating potential members should provide information on the individuals' interests and strengths. The group wanted people with a range of backgrounds, jobs, and ages, and were particularly interested that those nominated have the time to be active and involved.

From the faculty nominations fifteen individuals accepted their invitations to become members of the Humanities Advisory Council. The informal invitation was followed by a formal invitation from the college president. The first session was a dinner meeting at which the college president and other college officials welcomed the new committee members. Dennis Peters will be the Division's liaison with the Committee.

•Olympic College (Bremerton, Washington) -- Polly Zanetta

As in the case of Shoreline Community College, the stimulus for a Humanities Advisory Committee came after Polly Zanetta, Chairwoman of the Humanities Division, and two faculty members attended the Center for the Study of Community Colleges' May workshop. The two faculty members were very enthusiastic about establishing a group and discussed it at a Division meeting. The Division decided to form a committee, made up of four instructors, which was charged with developing a formal proposal to establish a lay advisory committee. The final proposal was sent to each member of the Division, and at the next Divisional meeting it was accepted by all.

The proposal was then sent to the Dean of Instruction and the college president. Both were receptive to the proposal but had some concerns, particularly regarding the ability of members with a general humanities background or interest to advise on particular disciplines. Written statements on the usefulness of committees whose members share a broad interest and concern for the humanities and comments from people at other institutions where such groups have been established convinced the Dean that such groups could be viable and beneficial.

By February the Division was in the final stages of selecting and notifying committee members. All the faculty in the Humanities Division were encouraged to nominate candidates for the nine member committee and the nominated individuals had to be acceptable to the entire Division. The following criteria guided the nominating procedure: members represent the college's entire service area, members' interests cover all disciplines in the Division, and at least one member be involved with the public schools. The formal invitations to the community members are being issued by the Dean of Instruction. This is the same procedure used in appointing vocational advisory committees. Ms. Zanetta has been asked by the Division to serve as the official representative. At the first meeting members will be asked to consider involving themselves in several projects, including helping to set up a Humanities Honors Program and assisting the Division in strengthening its community outreach efforts.

•San Diego Community College District (San Diego, California) -- Dorothy Berger

The planning for an advisory committee to assist in a multi-campus, rather than a single campus, district required a different approach than that described above. Ms. Berger first presented the proposal for an advisory committee to the District Executive Council, a group made up of the college presidents, the senate presidents, the bargaining agent representatives, the student council presidents, and all district level directors. The Council was very receptive to the idea and encouraged Ms. Berger to proceed. She then obtained approval from the four faculty senates, the United Student Council and the Chancellor. In addition, she spoke to a sizeable number of faculty at the different campuses to gain their support. The proposal was then placed as an agenda item on the docket for the District Board of Trustees. The Board had before it the rationale for such a committee and its purposes, namely to consider such topics as:

- Assessment of community needs and interests related to the humanities;

- Review the scope of current humanities offerings;
- Methods of recruitment and employment of students;
- Development of public information programs related to the humanities;
- Development of cooperative programs and internships with institutions such as museums, libraries, and symphony orchestras;
- Methods of bolstering declining public funds for humanities programs

In December 1980 the Board approved the formation of a District Lay Advisory Committee for the Humanities and authorized the Chancellor to convene the committee. The group will consist of 15 community members chosen because they are deeply involved in some way with at least one aspect of the humanities, and have the time and interest to serve as advisors to the District, and two faculty members and one administrator from each campus. Nominations for community members can come from any trustee, administrator, or faculty member. Selection of members will be made by the Chancellor and Senate Presidents with the formal appointment coming from the Chancellor. The faculty are to be selected by each Senate President, and can be either humanities instructors or occupational faculty with an interest in the humanities; the administrator, who is to be from the humanities area, will be appointed by the campus president.

Failures

In one multi-campus district the chancellor approved the idea of a committee and assigned a humanities instructor the responsibility for forming such a group. The instructor received some release time for a semester to work on this project and during that time formed an inter-campus committee of faculty people from the humanities department on all three campuses. The committee met a few times and devoted its efforts toward the issues of who should be invited to serve on the lay advisory group, who should make the initial phone calls to potential members, and from whom should the formal invitation come.

Responsibility for forming the advisory group was then given to another instructor. Again release time was granted for a semester. Some 18 months after the chancellor approved the idea, a list of community people had been generated and invited to join. Sixteen individuals accepted and the Board met in June, 1980. The meeting included presenters from all three campuses and sparked enthusiasm for several projects among the new Board members.

Then the instructor who had been assigned the leadership role assumed another position within the District, and no release time was available for someone else to take over the role of Board organizer and liaison. The future of the Advisory Board seemed to be riding on the question of whether another humanities instructor would be given release time to take over the position of campus leader.

• In a second multi-campus district the chancellor approved the idea and assigned a third-level district administrator the task of forming a group. This person convened a committee of faculty members from all the colleges in the district. This faculty committee met four to six times, elected a chairperson, and resolved to consider first what it would take to gain a sense of the humanities among all the campuses in the district. They felt that addressing this issue was a necessary prerequisite before a district wide community advisory group could be formed. At the end of the academic year little progress had been made to resolve the first issue and over the summer other concerns seemed to take precedence over an advisory group for the humanities. Within a year the entire idea of a community group to serve as advocates for the humanities seems to have been dropped.

• In a third multi-campus district a humanities division chairperson took it upon himself to form an advisory committee. Faculty were invited to nominate individuals and the administration approved the formation of such a group. The committee was established as an ecumenical council with representatives from the major religious organizations in the area and a few other people. The group met quarterly for a year. The meetings were primarily spent with the division chairperson, who served as the committee head, and a few faculty members telling the group about various campus activities. Little seems to have been done to encourage the committee to become involved in a project. Consequently, during the second year no meetings were held since apparently the committee had nothing to do.

Comments

A few guidelines can be drawn from the successful and unsuccessful examples enumerated above. First, the idea of a lay advisory committee to the humanities will fail if it is imposed by the administration and assigned to someone who is neither supportive nor enthusiastic about the concept, but merely assumes the responsibility as part of his/her job or because release time has been given to work on establishing such a group.

Second, the idea will fail if the majority of faculty within the humanities department do not support it. A faculty person, preferably a department chairperson, must present the idea and gain support -- or at least neutralize the opposition -- among his/her colleagues. Administrative support should be solicited early on; it helps if the president of the college shows the faculty and the committee that he/she approves of the idea.

Third, the uses and operations of the committee need to be articulated. It is a serious mistake to convene busy and active people to serve either as a listening panel or to perform a rubber stamp function on projects or issues that the staff have previously decided to work on. The committee can and must be involved in specific activities, such as promoting an honors program, recruiting community resources and support for the college's humanities program, visiting classrooms to speak on behalf of the humanities to the students, and generating vigorous support for the humanities at college board meetings. In general the committee cannot act in program planning (the board is the policy-making body) but it can provide information useful for planning. The committee can question the role of the humanities at the college, the resources available

for them, and the program goals. It can work with the faculty in designing a community survey regarding the future of the humanities. The very presence of interested community people helps the humanities instructors think differently about their own work.

Lastly, a multi-campus district may have more difficulty in establishing a group than a single campus. Certainly, more people have to be involved, and there should be a supportive faculty person on each campus working to gain faculty approval for the idea. It may be necessary to obtain the Board of Trustees support and then have encouragement from a high level campus administrator. Although the process may be more complicated, the benefits gained will more than outweigh the difficulties. As our chairman put it, "The Lay Advisory Committee is a way for me to relate to my colleagues differently. It is fun and exciting. It's an antidote to the deadening repetitiveness of our work. It gives us a new set of peers to relate to."

This report is one in a series of reports being written by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges as part of "Revitalizing the Humanities in the Community College," a Washington State Board for Community College Education project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Individuals who desire more information can obtain from the ERIC Clearinghouse Advisory Committees for the Humanities ED 188 669.

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